

AIR DEFENDER IS I CORPS' NCO OF THE YEAR

by Sgt. Rusty Qualls



"I'm not better than anyone else. I just wanted it more," said Sgt. Sean A. Coombs, a Patriot crew chief in D Battery, 2nd Battalion, 1st Air Defense Artillery. This hunger, this primal drive, this relentless pursuit enabled Coombs to max the ultimate test of his Army career: the I Corps NCO of the Year Board.

This test was actually a year-long process, starting with a Soldier of the Quarter Board in Southwest Asia where Coombs' unit was deployed on a six-month rotation. He lost a Battalion NCO of the Quarter Board there, but came back to win the next NCO of the Quarter Board, the Battalion NCO of the Year Board, and the 35th ADA Brigade NCO of the Year Board.

The I Corps NCO of the Year Board lived up to its reputation for toughness, Coombs said, noting that it was an intense experience to be grilled by eight command sergeants major, plus the I Corps command sergeant major. The physical training test and command sergeant major's run were also difficult, Coombs said. The PT test was administered by the NCO Academy who enforced "more than the letter of the law."

The tall, lean ADA sergeant said his desire came from his experiences when he was growing up in Los Angeles, Calif. While other kids were out playing, Coombs explained, he would help

his mom with her catering business or walk around construction sites with his dad. These experiences made him more mature and responsible than his peers, but not being accepted by them was hard on his self-image. Coombs is also dyslexic (he sees letters upside down) and this presented another challenge that affected his self-image. These challenges, however, gave him great determination to prove his worth.

When Coombs joined the Army in 1989, it gave him an opportunity to excel because it matched the maturity and responsibility his parents had taught him with a profession that puts a premium on those qualities. "I like the Army because I'm good at it. I like the responsibility of making things happen," he said.

Winning the I Corps NCO of the Year Board was the second most important thing that ever happened to him, Coombs said. "The only thing that happened to me that was more important was marrying my wife (Jennifer Lynn Coombs)."

"I don't know how I did it," Coombs said. "The people who cared about me were in my corner; God was in my corner. Deep inside I think I'm made of better stuff. Maybe because I've been through harder stuff."